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What To Wear?

E. S. Phelps.

K S193 $13.50

WHAT TO WEAR?

BY

Ward, ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS,
AUTHOR OF "THE GATES AJAR."

"There's nane ever feared that the truth should be heard,
But they whaum the truth wad indict."

"A glorious thing is prudence;
And they are useful friends
Who never make beginnings
Till they can see the ends.
But give us now and then a man,
That we may make him king,
Just to scorn the consequence,
And just to do the thing."

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NOTE.

THE first four sections of this pamphlet are reprinted from the columns of "The Independent," as read in a single paper before the New-England Woman's Club.

WHAT TO WEAR?

I.

GORGONS, OR GRACES?

HELVETIUS tells us of a lady and a parson who looked through a telescope at the moon. Having satisfied their thirst for knowledge, they reported to one another its results.

"I," said the parson, "saw grand cathedral spires."

"But I," said the lady, "thought — I saw — a pair of lovers."

To turn the telescope of our thought upon any object which lies within the realm of legitimate dispute is perhaps to see in it only some such subtle reflection of our individual temperament, training, or desires. I doubt if there exists *under* the moon any matter for discussion about which more incoherent and noncohesive opinions are rife among people who ought to be able to arrive at some unity of perception

and purpose, than about matters which concern the practical welfare of women. Among others, the study of that particular puzzle, the modes and morals of their dress, has been unusually unfortunate in its history. It swims in a lunar glamour, it suffers lunar eclipses, it rises and rests in lunar moods, it is at a lunar distance from our acquaintance. Is it a question of love-making? Is it one of religious architecture? Can it be more than a desperate attempt to express individual conclusions bravely, and to listen to them teachably?

There can be, I suppose, but two leading questions to be raised upon this subject:

1. Is the character of woman's dress such as to require regeneration? And

2. What are the practical means of regenerating it?

To the first and simpler of these inquiries I am ready, for one, to answer with the promptness born of those convictions which rise upon the stepping-stones of our dead opinions to (at least self-) satisfactory things, that the present dress of woman is

BAD TASTE,

BAD HYGIENE,

and

BAD MORALS.

I sat the other day in a street-car, opposite neighbor to a brown alpaca dress. It was a bright brown, bordering on the shades of butternut oil: it was a cheap stuff, flimsy and coarse. Upon this dress I counted ten bright, brown, cheap, and flimsy ruffles; twelve flimsy, cheap, brown, bright bows; and folds which faded into the "vast abrupt" of the uncleanly straw in which they dragged, beyond the reach of my arithmetical education. Over this dress an upper-dress of bright-green delaine fell cheerfully. The upper-dress was "finished" with four intricate black folds, and certain irrelevant black buttons in buttonless locations, dotted hither and thither like spilled huckleberries on a grassy field. A gray garment of the cloak genus surmounted this, fitted so closely as to reveal every "charm" of a high-shouldered, long-waisted, and flat-chested figure. The sleeves of this garment were wide, and exposed a bare, brown, bony wrist, surrounded with tumbled lace, clasped with a gutta-percha bracelet, and shrinking from the winter wind, which blew to the uncovered elbow sharply. About the neck of this robe were suspended a cherry-colored silk handkerchief, a necklace (presumably akin to the bracelet), a glass-bead cross, of the sort called "crystal," a fur tippet, a lace frill, and a velvet string. Gutta-percha earrings, whose pattern was a

study for a journey, depended a few inches above; false curls fell about them, and became entangled with them occasionally, to the serious endangerment of the outer lobe of the owner's ear; rows of false braids supervened, and the stuffing of "rats" protruded here and there.

The whole was covered with a mansard-roof of black velvet, blue ribbon, pink roses, gray raspberries, bead fringe, "imitation" lace, and green feathers, edged with several inches of false ringlets sewed underneath the eaves, and dripping — fantastic icicles — upon the front which they adorned. Within this chaste combination of effects was a woman all of fifty-two years old; a Yankee woman, — long, lean, gaunt, red, grave. She carried a muff and two yards of white "cloud." When she rose, she tripped upon her dress (which trailed the ground). When she left the car, she tripped upon her cloud; the muff engaged her hands and her lace-bound, shivering wrists; at the car-door she tripped again; and tripping, still tripping, a ghastly parody of maiden playfulness, she tripped herself out of sight.

The brother of this lady (a glance indicated the relationship) accompanied her. There were six feet of him: his elbows were sharp, his knees were crooked, the family gauntness sat upon his high cheekbones,

the family redness on his neck, the family grimness on his every motion. Had they changed garments, but for the stubbed beard of the one and the lesser stature of the other, they would not have been easy of identification. The plain pattern and solid substance of the man's dress became him; the broad-brimmed hat softened the outline of the congenital cheeks, the dark severity of the mottled coat repelled attention from rather than attracted it to the inherited angularity; the freedom of his warmly-gloved hands and unimpeded limbs bestowed a comparative ease upon the native awkwardness. In his own clothes, the man was no Apollo; but a fair-looking, unnoticeable man. In his sister's, he would have been a hag. Dressed upon the principle on which her brother dressed, the woman would have presented an appearance of comfort, warmth, fitness, and good sense, which only positive deformity can render otherwise than agreeable to the eye. In her own clothes, she was a Gorgon.

A caricature? I think hardly. Take the trouble to test it. You will find my Gorgon at the next street-corner, at every dry-goods counter, at any railway station.

It is not in our drawing-rooms that we should look to judge of the intrinsic worth of any style of dress. The street-car is a truer crucible of its inherent value.

Our poor Medusa was "fashionably dressed." Lady Vere de Vere, upon the avenue, wears no smaller panniers, not a frill, a curl, a frizzle the less, or more; on occasions scarcely a quieter choice of color. The copy shows daubed a little beside the model; that is all. You may paint what seems to you a finished picture. Photograph it. How your blunders swarm into sight! Every inaccuracy of drawing, all disproportion of design, each uneven stroke your false brush took, stares you in the face. "A photograph is not a picture," we are told. Perhaps not; but the camera is a useful instrument, and it does us no harm to resort to it now and then.

Beauty in dress, as in other arts, will, I fancy, establish its birthright by the ease with which it adjusts itself to unbeautiful surroundings. The Highland plaid is not ungraceful on humble shoulders. The short skirt and little *bonnet* of the French peasant are not uncomely because the peasant wears them. The white silk neckerchief of the Quakeress can never become common nor unclean.

The West End must go to the North End for its preachers, since we live in conditions under which the North End may come to the West End for its patterns, if it would study the character of its pretensions to artistic custom.

The suggestion may justify my selection of Medusa as a representative of the existing modes of female attire. I think she is a representative as fair as can be found.

Grace of outline, propriety of adjustment to personal peculiarities, delicacy in selection of color, simplicity in choice of ornament, fitness to uses, and regard for the relations of quantity and quality, are each and all outraged in the toilet of Medusa. Grace, propriety, delicacy, simplicity, fitness, and proportion, are each and all outraged in the modes which Medusa apes.

Surely it is one of the simplest laws of taste in dress, that it shall not attract undue attention from the wearer to the worn.

The Girl of the Period, sauntering before one down Broadway, is one panorama of awful surprises from top to toe. Her clothes characterize her. She never characterizes her clothes. She is upholstered, not ornamented. She is bundled, not draped. She is puckered, not folded. She struts, she does not sweep. She has not one of the attributes of nature nor of proper art. She neither soothes the eye like a flower, nor pleases it like a picture. She wearies it like a kaleidoscope. She is a meaningless dazzle of broken effects.

Surely it is one of the requisites of a tasteful garb that the expression of *effort* to please shall be wanting in it; that the mysteries of the toilet shall not be suggested by it; that the steps to its completion shall be knocked away like the sculptor's ladder from the statue, and the mental force expended upon it be swept away out of sight like the chips on the studio floor.

Who that is mathematically or metaphysically inclined can meet a modishly-attired woman without a calculation of the hours expended upon the architecture of her dress, without a guess at the stitches in a hem, at the hems to a frill, at the frills to a skirt, at the skirts to a dress; without dissecting the organization of her chignon in the anatomy of melancholy; without a morbid wonder if she wore her front friz to breakfast in her crimping-pins?

"Any material object," says Ruskin, "which can give us pleasure in the simple contemplation of its outward qualities, without any direct and definite exertion of the intellect, I call in some way or in some degree beautiful." It is painful to consider the "exertion of intellect" expended upon the contemplation of the modern belle. An exhaustive analysis of the law of excluded middle, an intelligent defence of the categorical imperative, a serious attack of the theory

of evolution, might justify it. If "exertion of intellect" stands censor on the beauty of our costume, Heaven save the mark!

Surely it is a condition of taste in dress that its *cost* shall not be protruded upon the public notice. In a state of society in which it is not an uncommon event for women to pay twenty dollars a yard for their velvet, forty for their lace, three hundred for a walking-suit to shop in, sixty for a bonnet, and a tolerably well-to-do man's salary to a dressmaker, how ingenious become their efforts to rival each other in the display of the wherewithal they have been clothed! To exist as an advertisement of her husband's income, or her father's generosity, has become a second nature to many a woman who must have undergone, one would say, some long and subtle process of degradation before she sunk so low, or grovelled so serenely.

I conceive that it is use, and use alone, which leads one of us, tolerably trained to recognize any criterion of grace or any sense of the fitness of things, to tolerate, if for the sake of grace and fitness only, the styles of dress to which we are more or less conforming every day of our lives. Fifty years hence they will seem to us as *uncultivated* as the nose-rings of the Hottentot seem to-day. The *dictum* of our great-grandchildren upon, for instance, what has been

termed the "Kangaroo" style of dress will also contain new and severer elements of criticism than any which go to form our judgment upon fashions which repel us only because they are out of date.

How endless our ingenuity in sowing the seeds of this criticism! If we have a pretty foot, we wear our heels beneath our insteps, and cripple it. If we have abundant hair, we cover it with the hair of some uncleanly dead grisette, or twine with it an Indian weed which is namelessly horrible, and which exposes the wearer to nameless horrors. If we have a pretty dress, we cut it up, we slash it off, we twist it hither, we snip it yon, we bolster it here, we stuff it there, we mutilate it everywhere.

Apply to this practice, ever so loosely, the celebrated and time-honored Platonic theory, that beauty consists in "the perfect suitableness of means to their end"! "This (the practice of trimming) is a blunder in art," says Charles Reade (from Plato to whom, the slip may be a little jerky, but the road is direct), "no less universal than it is amazing, when one considers the amount of apparent thought the sex devotes to dress."

Charles Reade knows very little about women; but he knows enough to know that he inflicted in these words a very large wound with a very small arrow.

Indeed, the appearance of a *tastefully* attired woman on a fashionable promenade to-day reminds one, in its results, of the old Indian fable of the beautiful young god who appeared among a nation of hunchbacks. He was saved from death, we are told, "only by the ingenuity of one who had seen other men," and who suggested that they should repair to the temple to "thank the gods that Heaven had, at least, bestowed upon *them* the gift of beauty."

For myself, I confess that I never feel thoroughly *ashamed* of being a woman, except in glancing over a large, promiscuous, assembly, and contrasting the comparative simplicity, solidity, elegance, and good sense of a man's apparel with the affectation, the flimsiness, the tawdriness, the ugliness, and the imbecility of a woman's. For her mental and moral deficiencies, my heart is filled with a great compassion and prompt excuse. Over her physical inferiority, I mourn not as one without hope. When I consider the pass to which she has brought the one sole science of which she is supposed to be yet mistress, my heart misgives me down to the roots of every hope I cherish for her.

II.

"DRESSED TO KILL."

THE enormities of a woman's dress, having done their best to deform her body, will very naturally do their bravest to destroy it.

So far and so fast has this work proceeded, that the scholarly physician invited to address the New England Club upon woman's physical fitness to be, to do, or to suffer, can find, in the realm of his cultivated thought, no more grateful or graceful thing to tell you, educated, thinking ladies, known to be hopeful of woman's future, trustfully anxious for her higher development, and absorbed in elevating her actual condition, than that your hopes are moonbeams, your anxious trust the diversion of overwrought credulity, your absorption in your work the blind enthusiasm of ignorance; that woman's constitution, being subject to peculiar conditions, must forever forbid her keeping pace with her brother or her husband in in-

tellectual culture, and entirely negative the question of her industrial success or existence. So low has the clinical ideal of woman fallen! So dark are the doctor's spectacles! So great and growing the physical disability, at least of American women!

If there were no other cause (and their name is legion) to account for the feeble physiques and prevailing ailments of the present generation of women, I believe that their present modes of dress alone would explain the mystery nearly all. *That a woman wears a biassed* dress and a long skirt is enough, in itself considered, to make an invalid of her under favorable conditions, and sure to do so under disadvantageous ones.*

I put this assertion strongly because I feel and believe it in the strongest manner.

You will remind her of our grandmothers, — the fabulous grandmothers, the healthy, wealthy, and wise, — they who scrubbed floors, did the family washing, wove carpets, spun their husbands' coats, and brought up fourteen children, in biassed waists and long skirts. I reply that it is *because* they scrubbed floors, did the washing, wove the carpets, spun the coats, and *because* they brought up fourteen children, — and *because* they did this, and the time faileth me to tell what

* By this, is meant what women call a "plain waist."

else, in long skirts and biassed dresses that American girls are what they are to-day, — pallid, puny, undersized, undersouled, devoured by the backache, the headache, the heartache, a dark puzzle to the physiologist who undertakes their present relief, a sad problem to the political economist who looks to the future ideal society, the mothers of which they will be.

There is a grim wealth of tragedy in the terse popular phrase descriptive of a fashionably-attired woman. It has ceased to be a metaphor that she is "*dressed to kill.*"

"Six new diseases," we are told, "have come into existence with the styles of dress which require the wearing of multitudinous and heavy skirts."

Indeed, I wonder that there are not sixty. I wonder that women sustain, in even the wretched and disheartening fashion that they do, the strain and burden of their clothing. I wonder that any of us are left with unimpaired vitality for the pursuance of self-culture, for the prosecution of our business, for the rearing, care, and support of our families, for the whirling of the wheels within wheels of social duties which devolve dizzily upon us, till "the whip of the sky" has ceased to lash us into the struggle for existence. No doctrine but the doctrine of the "Survival of the Fittest" will touch the problem. We are of

tougher stuff than our brothers, or we should have sunk in our shackles long ago. It was well said by one of your own members, "Whenever I discuss this subject with the 'unawakened,' I resort to the simple inquiry, Could your father or your husband live in your clothes? Could he walk down town on a rainy day in your skirts? Could he conduct his business and support his family in your corsets? Could he prosecute 'a course of study' in your chignon?"

The prompt and ringing *No!* of the only possible answer is startling and suggestive. The muscular masculine physique could not endure the conventional burdens which the nervous feminine organization supports. The man would have yielded and sunk, where the woman has struggled and climbed.

I lay especial stress upon the close waist and long skirt as blunders in the methods of attire incumbent upon women, because, when I consider the smoothness of surface which a fitted waist involves, thereby requiring that strait-jacket, — worthy of the invention of an Alva, — the corset, for its proper effect; when a woman whom I know puts on a basque-waist such as she wore five years ago (like all women, she "never wore tight dresses!"), and feels her lungs contract and ache, and her breath come in uneasy gasps, and her arms, confined by solid seams, refuse to rise to the

height of a horse-car strap or a lifted curtain-tassel, and the whole system shrink and cramp itself to fit the unnatural restriction; when I see women stay indoors the entire forenoon because their morning-dresses trail the ground a half a yard, and indoors all the afternoon because there comes up a shower, and the walking-dress will soak and drabble all or nearly all of that; or when I see the "working-woman" standing at the counter or at the teacher's desk, from day to dark, in the drenched boots and damp stockings which her muddy skirts, flapping from side to side, have compelled her to endure; when I see her, a few weeks thereafter, going to Dr. Clarke for treatment, as a consequence; when I find, after the most patient experiment, that, in spite of stout rubbers, waterproof gaiters, and dress-skirt three or four inches from the ground, an "out-of-door girl" is compelled to a general change of clothing each individual time that she returns from her daily walks in the summer rain; when I see a woman climbing up stairs with her baby in one arm, and its bowl of bread and milk in the other, and see her tripping on her dress at every stair (if, indeed, baby, bowl, bread, milk, and mother do not go down in universal chaos, it is only from the effects of long skill and experience on the part of the mother in performing that acrobatic feat);

when physicians tell me what fearful jars and strains these sudden jerks of the body from stumbling on the dress-hem impose upon a woman's intricate organism, and how much less injurious to her a direct *fall* would be than this start and rebound of nerve and muscle, and how the strongest *man* would suffer from such accidents; and when they further assure me of the amount of calculable injury wrought upon our sex by the *weight* of skirting brought upon the hips, and by thus making the seat of all the vital energies the pivot of motion and centre of endurance; when I see women's skirts, the shortest of them, lying inches deep along the foul floors, which man, in delicate appreciation of our concessions to his fancy in such respects, has inundated with tobacco-juice, and from which she sweeps up and carries to her home the germs of stealthy pestilences; when I see a ruddy, romping school-girl in her first long dress, beginning to avoid coasting on her double-runner, or afraid of the stonewalls in the blueberry-fields, or standing aloof from the game of base-ball, or turning sadly away from the ladder which her brother is climbing to the cherry-tree, or lingering for him to assist her over the gunwale of a boat; when I read of the sinking of steamers at sea, with "nearly all the women and children on board," and the accompanying comments,

"Every effort was made to assist the women up the masts and out of danger till help arrived, but *they could not climb*, and we were forced to leave them to their fate;" or when I hear the wail with which a million lips take up the light words of the loafer on the Portland wharf, when the survivors of the "Atlantic" filed past him, "*Not a woman among them all! My God!*"* — when I consider these things, I feel that I have ceased to deal with *blunders* in dress, and have entered the category of *crimes*.

We should not overlook the minor sins in our confession, — such as the heating of the head with false hair, the distortion of the hands and feet with tight leather, the scantiness of warm underwear, the exclusion of heaven's air and light (as well as freckles) from the face by musty veils, exposure to the ague in winter and sunstroke in summer, and to the feverish heat of public assemblies, at all times induced by those mountains of mystery which we term hats. Nor can we over-estimate the mischief brought upon our sex by habitual attention to the making and mending, to the fashioning and refashioning, of our

* It is not to be supposed that women properly dressed from infancy, and acquiring the freedom and courage which a proper mode of dress imparts, would have met such a death, in such a wholesale manner.

clothes. Much sewing is a weariness to the flesh, and of making many garments there is no end.

A long train of doleful diseases follows upon the confinement of women to the needle or the treadle, as any thoughtful physician of the sewing sex can testify. For the one stitch necessary to keep soul and body together, probably twenty go in these days to frill and flounce them, to ruffle and tuck them, to embroider and braid them, till so much of soul is stitched into the body, and so much of body into soul, that the task of indicating which is which becomes a prize-problem to the most studious mind.

"I spent one hundred hours," said an educated and cultivated lady recently — and said it without a blush of shame or a tremor of self-depreciation — "I spent just one hundred hours in embroidering my winter suit. I could not afford to have it done. I took it up from time to time. It took me a hundred hours."

One hundred hours! One could almost learn a language, or make the acquaintance of a science, or apprentice one's self to a business, or nurse a consumptive to the end of her sufferings, or save a soul, in one hundred well-selected hours. One — hundred — hours!

III.

THE MORALE OF IT.

SAID one of our leading humorous poets once, with all of the earnestness and something of the sadness characteristic of humorists in non-professional life: "I am puzzled about this matter of a woman's dress. Sometimes I think the time will come when the *morale* of it will undergo a complete transformation. Sometimes I think there *is* something in human nature which requires one sex to array itself solely with a view to the attraction of the opposite one. But that is a pity — a pity! We men are a coarse race."

In one of those letters from obscure strangers in which one is apt to find one's most stirring inspirations and most soothing comprehensions, and in which one is never surprised to detect one's own best thoughts or most daring pirouettes of fancy anticipated with a directness which seems to create one a plagiarist in

the use of them, I remember having been struck, a year or two since, with these words: "I believe that the enormities of female attire have now reached a point to which it is not *morally right* for a conscientious woman to conform."

It seems to me that in these two remarks we have the Dress Reform Question in a beechnut-shell.

Woman was made for man. Heaven gifted her with peculiar graces and beauties of person for his attraction. She has always cultivated them with an especial view to exerting this attraction. Devotion to the art of dress has been with her hitherto a sexual duty. The scented baths of the harem, the square corsage of the Louis Quatorze Court, the short-waisted dresses of our grandmothers, the bare neck and arms of your little daughter at the dancing party last week, mean the same thing.

In the natural pursuance of the interest which exists between the sexes, the personal decoration of the woman shall receive an unnatural and degrading culture. This is the principle, — as old as Eve, as subtle as the serpent, as strong as life, as sad as death.

Has the world arrived at that stage of growth, or the principle itself at that point of decay, at which it is no longer "morally right"?

This is the question.

Whether the naturalist has an argument for us upon this point, when he reminds us that throughout the animal world it is the *male* who is endowed with peculiar graces, which he cultivates for the criticism and hoped approval of the female, is a query, though not to our present, to some good purpose. However this may be, the sexual theory of dress has obtained a kind of existence and found a sort of favor which require definite attention and definite (if any) opposition. Have not the most anxious and earnest of us blundered in attacking the conclusions of this theory, to the neglect of the premises? We have mistaken the outpost for the enemy, the skirmish for the battle. We have railed at frills and flounces, we have written columns at trains and earrings, we have exhausted breath in denouncing five-thousand-dollar shawls and *décolleté* dresses; and "lovely woman" has only added a ruffle to our every word, a jewel to our every line, deducted from the top of her dress and added to the bottom, with one to carry, for every spasm of our reproof, exhortation, persuasion.

Perhaps, to take an historical view of the matter, a New York belle may have gained something upon Cleopatra in respect to the simple decencies of dress. How much may be a fair inquiry.

Why does a man wear a linen collar and a cloth coat, and his wife wear corsets and a muslin waist with low linings?

Why does he clothe himself in flannel from head to foot and neck to wrist, and her under (if not her outer) clothing require that she bare her neck and arms to the freezing but "becoming" caress of Valenciennes edging on a winter's day?

Let us ask a few of these questions, even if we must answer them by propounding others. We are Yankee women; and that is the only way, I suppose, that Yankees learn any thing. For one, I do not believe that there is any rational answer to be found to them, nor that there is any explanation of the facts which suggest them but the one which we have supposed.

Of what other principle is a fashionable "full-dress" (the satire of the term!) an outgrowth? What else does a square neck signify? Why otherwise did one of our recent modes lead (supposably) well-bred and modest school-girls to traverse the streets and horse-cars with a drapery sleeve, baring their arms nearly to the arm-pit? And another not only cut out the necks of their dresses so as to expose the beautiful young flesh freely, but fasten a shining locket thereon, to call attention to its grace and relieve its whiteness?

That a modest woman will attire herself in an immodest style does not purify or dignify the style. It only proves *how* ignorant a good woman can be.

It falls far short of the target to reply with the old reproving proverb, "*Honi soit qui mal y pense.*" There are intricate moral digressions of simple points in which it is a shame to that mature intelligence which does *not* "evil think." We must take things as they are, human nature as we find it. We live in a diseased world. Our simplest experiments at life are pathological at best.

Not to enter into the details of a mournful matter, for which private study is more fitting than public dissection, it seems as if the simple fact that the changing styles of a pure woman's dress, the civilized world over, have been, for years now many enough to shame us to the soul, dictated by the corrupt imaginations and polluted ingenuity of French harlots, were enough to *shock* a thoughtful woman into asking, How shall these things be? Can the bitter fountain send out sweet waters? the poisoned tree bear healing fruit? Is that *system* of things right which binds a woman's life to the gospel of self-adornment, and which regulates that adornment by such a decalogue?

IV.

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

To incorporate with one's active convictions such views of the character of female attire is half the battle; but it is only half.

Most of us are more or less aware of the need of reform in this direction; but perhaps none of us can confidently see a rod before us through the fog which inwraps the waymarks by which the reform is to be effected.

For one thing, the average woman, on whose suffrages we must depend for all reforming force, is probably contented with the principles upon which her sex dresses, and, for the most part, with their methods of execution. Clumsiness of detail may annoy her, for the average women is no fool; she may lose her temper over a sash-end now and then; she is at times, however gently put together, a veritable vixen on the subject of hemming frills; her

anathemas of her drabbled dress-skirt amount to what has been termed an "angel's profanity," on a sweet, serene, slushy, March morning. Yet with the *plan* upon which women adorn themselves, and of which the most patent absurdities which afflict the soul and body of her to the verge of revolt are but the natural expression, she is, I think, wholly at peace.

To add to the difficulty of dealing with her upon this or any kindred point, the average women is very much upon her guard to-day against encroachment upon her habits, or disturbance of her convictions. A dozen years ago she could be warily led into the atmosphere of healthy doubt, and surprised into newer if not better temperatures of thought. She is alert now, aroused. There is a surcharge of electricity in the air. While she breathes, she thinks, suspects. The old weather-records are safe and familiar. The sun rose and set; men married, and women were given in marriage; children were born, died, and gathered to their fathers; and the sky was calm. If thunder-storms crouch on the brow of the hill, whose fault may it be? Yours, perhaps. Under your most reticent allusion to the ballot she discerns, at the least, open atheism and covert free-love, if not an opium-fed baby, and a dinnerless and buttonless husband. Through your vaguest suggestion as to the healthful-

ness of shoulder-straps, she sees herself walking up the aisle at church in the scantest of bloomers, and a stovepipe hat. Ah! She is as wise as a serpent; she is as harmless as a dove: she will not denounce you; she will only beware you.

Again, we are told that the love of personal adornment is inherent in the feminine constitution, and desirably so; that this involves a wider distinction between the apparel of the sexes than mere social security requires; that the native modesty of women will and must forbid the bridging of this distinction; that harmony between the sexes requires that women cultivate the beautiful for beauty's sake and their own; that, though the American mother become an extinct race, the American girl must weight her hips, and curl her hair, and read the fashion-books.

In these, as in all errors, there might be truth enough to take the nerve out of the arm that would strike them, often at an instant when a blow would shatter the amalgamate image, and shiver the brass from the iron, the iron from the clay, and all from the silver and the gold.

Again, we may bear about within our week-day creeds the assurance that we are conforming to an uncultivated, unhealthful, and immoral standard of action, and be checked at the very outset of an at-

tempt to elevate it, by a series of petty perplexities puzzling in proportion to their littleness and as burdensome as they are base.

Our untrimmed dress may consign us to the sixth story of the hotel. Our mountain-suit, worn upon Washington Street, would lodge us in the charge of the police.

That it should be done is one matter: how to do it is quite another.

Now, in the first place, nothing will be done until some considerable body of women shall agree upon what they wish and will to do.

Mademoiselle may confine her creed to six frills; madame to five and a fold; I may succumb to my dressmaker upon the subject of overskirts; you may oppose her successfully on principle and preference; Maude will content herself with loosening her corset an inch or two; and Mabel will conceive of herself as having conceded every thing to the Coming Woman, in refusing to follow the inane and ill-bred custom of dragging her walking-dress in the mud whenever the fashion so to do "comes round" in turn. We are in Cimmerian darkness and disquiet upon the matter: we need light first, and organization immediately.

Suppose that any such body of women, of cultivated intelligence, should propose to itself some such catechism as this: —

1. Are there any important characteristics of the actual which should be retained in the ideal feminine attire?

2. What are they?

3. What should be dispensed with ultimately?

4. What *can* be dispensed with immediately?

5. Is there any thing in the essential modesty of a woman which forbids her so fashioning her garments as to be able to enter many active, gymnastic kinds of trade or recreation, from which public opinion, as crystallized in her costume, now excludes her?

6. Does either the essential modesty of the feminine nature or the safety of society require that a woman wear drapery below the knee?

Suppose by starting with half a dozen such inquiries, such a body of women should multiply them at their leisure, and ramify them into reach of those details which thwart the sex at the root of all improvement in its condition.

Suppose that such a body of ladies — for instance the New England Club — should call into council with itself one hundred ladies of that degree and kind of social influence which weighs in such a matter, in each of the cities of New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, and San Francisco. Suppose that seven hundred, let us say per-

haps a thousand women, duly scattered throughout the country, should agree upon certain changes in their dress, and pledge themselves to their adoption. Suppose that, acting independently of French modes and mode-making (for I am convinced that this reform, if it ever comes about, will find its vantage-ground, with other emancipations, in America), we win the sympathy and command the prestige of our Republican Court, and that the leaders of fashion are let into the secret; that Mrs. Grant, for instance, were our president, and Madame Demorest our committee on design; that the Lady's Books became our gospels, and the pattern pamphlets the tracts of our new dispensation! Suppose, in short, that, by one subtle, strong *coup d'état*, the thinking women of America could make it *fashionable* to dress like rational creatures?

Something of the nature of the American costume — the gymnasium dress, the beach suit, the Bloomer, call it what you will — must take the place of our present style of dress, before the higher life — moral, intellectual, political, social, or domestic — can ever begin for women. Many of us feel no more individual doubt of this than we do of seeing woman welcomed at the ballot-box or in the Christian pulpit.

But two objections are urged against it, with which

we are all familiar. We are told that it is ungraceful; and that women, so sensitive to the graces of life as to wear camels' humps upon their backs and market-gardens upon their heads, will never submit to it. We are told that it is immodest; and that women who go half-undressed to whirl the evening through in a young man's arms in that delicate pastime, the waltz, can never shock their finer natures so far as to sink to it.

I should like the opinion of any candid artist as to the relative beauty of the sight of a group of fresh young school-girls in their gymnasium suits, and the same girls dressed for the promenade, an hour later; or even of an active woman of sixty, fern-hunting in her mountain dress, and the same woman in the fuss and feathers of her toilet at the hotel supper.

I should like any anxious sister to watch for a while the perfect protection and delicacy of the short-skirted, full-trousered costume, as its little wearer leaps the bars and swings the ladders of her "exercises," or climbs the rocks that diversify her seashore rambles, and then to stand upon the corner of Washington and Winter Streets upon a muddy day, and observe the shifts and exposures to which we are obliged to resort — every "maid, wife, and widow" of us — to keep our skirts above the flood and filth of the streets.

It may justly be said that we cannot at one fell swoop impose such a style of dress upon the prejudices of the public. Here, I fancy, has been our most serious mistake. Because we cannot turn the river, we have not dammed the brook; because we cannot do every thing at once, we have not lifted a finger to do any thing at all.

Suppose that we *begin* by shortening our skirts to a regulation-distance of from four to six inches from the ground; that we dispense with the biassed waist and corset, and retain the plaited gamp, or little jacket, which have been so popular; that we hang *every thing* from the shoulders; and that we set ourselves humbly to study the "grammar of ornament."

Would not those four points alone, if carefully considered, and patiently, gracefully, commandingly insisted upon, effect a quiet opening in all due time for braver and better things?

In leaving this study for a discussion, our own hearts must remind us of what we need no speaker to suggest,— the bearings of this question upon the responsibilities of *Christian* women. "All other objections to our habits of dress," said an earnest woman, "seem to me to run into this: they are such absorbents of *soul*. The money, the strength, the time, the thought, the power of lofty purpose, of strong

resolve, of great enactment, which they drain, should strike us dumb with shame. They are a waste of life; and when you have said that, you have said all."

There is something piercingly significant to the Christian ear in the dreary ring of the worn-out phrase, the *waste* of life. No sadder metaphor is known to Christian speech. Across no drearier desert can the Christian vision fall. Sometimes, in listening to the undertone which creeps from that direction, I seem to hear the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye here — even *here* — the way of the Lord! So great a matter has a little fire kindled! So intricate and so appalling has been the injury wrought upon our sex by the sins and sorrows of our dress! So intricate and appalling appears the process of its cure!

The little Chinese monster, grown from infancy in a pitcher, distorted into hideous mockery of natural proportions, changed into a thing human only because it is divine, might appeal to the instincts of the thoughtful observer with something of the quality and quantity of force with which the *woman of fashion* appeals to-day to the *woman of God.*

V.

AFTER THOUGHTS.

I SUPPOSE that what one does not say on any given subject may be of as much importance to the subject as that which one says. Especially must this be true, when the habit of close prevision and revision, of attempting to meet every possible disputant under all possible emergencies, and to forestall any probable misunderstanding by all practicable precaution, which becomes such an occasion of earthly care and heavenly discipline to the writer, yields in part to the instinct of immediate persuasion which controls the speaker.

Those views of the great need and peculiar claims of a dress reform which the opening sections of this pamphlet set forth have met, in connection with their previous appearance, with a kind of reception which has strengthened my belief in the growing interest felt in their subject, and has suggested to me that a

few pages which shall treat of the *objections* with which they have been received may not come amiss either to reader or to author.

These perhaps can be classified in four important points.

1. *a.* The extravagance of woman's dress has received insufficient attention. *b.* The extravagance of woman's dress has been overrated.

2. The inherent love of beauty calls for more notice than it has found.

3. Upon the physiological questions involved, women require more minute enlightment.

4. The actual concession to the desire of attracting men in the selection of costume has been exaggerated.

Perhaps the extravagant aspect of the dress question does not always fill its full importance in one's mind, because it seems to be more easily adjustable than some others. Settle a few other points which logically precede it, and it will duly and logically settle itself.

When women dress gracefully, they will not dress extravagantly, for extravagance is not grace; nor when healthfully, for health of body leads to health of soul; nor when modestly, for modesty shuns display. While we break the greater law, the less can-

not be mended. As long as our principles of dress are vitally erroneous in more comprehensive directions, it will avail little to turn much force in this. Is it not beginning at the wrong end? Is it not like trying to put out Vesuvius with a watering-pot?

Extravagance, too, is a constitutionally relative term. Grace, health, and morals are absolute facts. My habits of life seem as extravagant to my washwoman as the Prince Demidoff's seem to me. Who shall decide among the doctors of the social system? What standard of justifiable expenditure do we possess?

Do we possess any at all but the Christian standard? But here again: What is the Christian standard? Is it fixed, or proportional? Does it "exist as substance, or as accident"? Are there not as good Christians on the Milldam as are to be found in any orthodox country parish? I may have reason to suppose Miss Dickinson to be a benevolent Christian woman. Shall I question either her benevolence or her Christianity, because she wears diamonds and gold-colored, lace-trimmed silk dresses? I may not wear diamonds nor gold-colored dresses. I may not be inclined to think that the ideal woman or the ideal Christian will do so. But who made me a judge over Miss Dickinson's inherent right to eat diamonds, if she chose to,

and could afford it? Has she, or has she not, such a right, in the nature of rights and wrongs?

Such questions as these puzzle us all. The whole system of Christian economics is as yet one vast interrogation point.

But, after all, concede what we may to the uncertainties, does not the severe simplicity of the life of Christ strike our laxer moods on these subjects, now and then, with the infinite pathos and the subtle reproach of a strain of minor music in a ballroom? When we read that death by starvation in New-York City is a perfectly well-authenticated and not infrequent fact, and turn a leaf and are told how the flowers at a bridal in that city cost two thousand dollars, or how the last new trotter went at private sale for forty thousand, does not the *spirit* of that consecrated Life seem to our better judgment wronged?

I think the most uncertain of us must feel, that, in the millennial life, individual conscience will rebel against a state of things in which the *extremes* of luxury and deprivation will be *possible.*

This brings to mind another point in which the class of people who have the means, and use them, to live in the higher degrees of luxury, and who seem to derive thence something of the tropical disinclination to unpleasant convictions, apparently

take great comfort. I refer to the employment of the needy classes in the manufacture of luxuries. By the employment of these classes, it is reasoned, the most unbounded personal expenditure is justifiable in those who have the means of such expenditure at their disposal.

This is a doubtful view to take of a difficult matter: if it becomes the only view, a dangerous one, yet as plausible and perplexing a one as could be well selected.

This is not the place, nor am I the person, nor are my tropical friends the people, to treat of the intricacies of the question in a satisfactory manner.

Only so much as this seems to be clear enough to be clearly understood by us all.

It is true that the easy life of the rich eases the life of the poor. It is true that the promotion of each new industry provides means of support for a new class of people. It is true that the extravagances of life are not altogether the thieves of life, but largely support life.

But better political economists than you or I will tell us that the profits on the manufacture of luxuries are divided with no more reference to the real needs of society than they are with reference to the A. B. C. F. M., or the Association for the help of Indigent

Ministers; and that certain kinds of industry are in themselves injurious to society at large; and that duty lies not in the direction of their encouragement, but of their positive discouragement.

It is true, dear madam, that half a dozen lace-makers may earn a living out of the lace you wear; but what a living! Study the history of lace-making in England and France if you will know. You support the wholesale and retail dealers — the well-to-do "middle-men" — by your custom. "Support" is a very large word to apply to the aid you grant the poor weaver at the other end of the long, light, dainty web which binds her wretchedness and your ease together. The rest of us have not the opportunities of the English Queen, who, with true Victorian tenderness, in pity of the destitution of the Devon lace-makers, had her wedding-dress made of their unfashionable fabric, and brought Honiton lace into vogue at the stroke of a kindly thought.

Are we sending to the tenders of the silk-worms, do you think, their fair profits on the brocade we buy to-morrow? or to the miners their honest share of the great golden ciphers which represent the diamonds on our dressing-tables?

Has the world's "younger son" ever yet received the portion of goods which falleth to him? Has his

elder brother ever yet meant in good faith that he should?

Certain kinds of manufacture are in themselves injurious to society: instance, the liquor, the opium, the tobacco, or the corset trade. Occasionally the world needs a glass of brandy, a cigar, a dose of morphine, or perhaps a corset; but most of us, I mean of "us" who are likely to read a paper on Dress-reform, would agree that the proportions of these manufactures are enormously beyond the admitted needs of society, and greatly to its general disadvantage, and that duty lies in the direction of their decided discouragement. This, at least in respect to the first two branches, is the prevailing *Christian* sentiment. Yet a great many worthy and needy people are supported by the tobacco, the liquor, the opium, and the corset trade. Shall we therefore encourage these trades to support these good people? No! for they are injurious to society at large.

We may invent new and legitimate ones, but we shall not prop the old and perverted.

With these, I class the trade in many of those luxuries which so disproportionately characterize the dress of women. The disproportion is of such a nature, and its effects upon women are so serious, as to place their present enormous manufacture among

the injurious industries of life. Art may require silk, lace, velvet, jewels, in their proper places. A Power to which art is subordinate, from which alone art receives its great commission, grants no passport to them in their existing shapes or with their existing claims. The "true woman" must reject their pretensions, and remand them to their proper posts. The false extravagances of female apparel do as dark a work for the world to undo as the trade in false stimulants. You may ruin a human soul just as thoroughly with a piece of point-lace as with a glass of cognac. Nothing demands our graver care to-day than imperilled womanhood; and nothing imperils womanhood more to-day than that theory of existence of which undue point-lace is the expression.

I cannot, in my wildest moments, bring myself to feel that I am under any obligation to wear a hundred-dollar "coronet" of false hair, in order to support the poor little uncleanly French girl who parted with it to buy her bread. It might be preferable to put the girl to box-making or to housework.

The renovation of old industries, the invention of new, but never the encouragement of the wrong, shall let the light of truth upon our perplexed and groping efforts to set heaven and earth at harmony.

It has seemed to me, however, necessary to our

purpose, to get face to face with some intelligent estimate of the actual character and extent of female extravagance, before we place much value upon any unattested theory of its workings. I have therefore been at some pains to collect for these pages price-lists from the more extensive departments of trade in women's wear.

These are confined, for several reasons, very largely to Boston trade. An under-estimate, rather than one above par, will be thus formed of the habits of dressy American women; since New York is unquestionably far beyond (or behind) Boston in the style of expense adopted by its expensive society. This should be borne in mind, with a large margin for annotations.

I desire very gratefully to acknowledge the courteous and generous response to my inquiries, which has been received from the different departments of trade to which I have applied. Several of these firms have kindly allowed me the use of their names, but others have preferred that the lists should appear without; and it has seemed better to withhold them all. It need only be said that the best and most reliable trade of the city is represented.

The lists, fairly accompanied with the comments of the senders, shall speak for themselves.

DRY-GOODS.

Shawls. — Our most expensive are from $500 to $750. It is *very* seldom that a shawl is sold over the former price. Very few are sold over $300.

Laces. — For flounces, $30 to $40 per yard. Lace being used very rarely, occasionally for a wedding-dress. There are very, *very* few laces sold over $5 per yard. Imitation laces are sold to a great extent.

Silk dresses. — Very many made up at a cost of over $150 up to $250. A private letter from a member of this firm says, —

"Judging from my experience, it is not the few wealthy people who purchase expensive merchandise, and *can afford so to do*, that are doing the foolish thing, but the middle and lower classes who do spend much more than they can afford to do. Commencing with those who earn the least, the domestics in our houses, I think it would be safe to say that over one half they earn is spent on dress. Then, again, many persons with moderate incomes have a foolish idea that dress makes the man or woman.

"The whole importation* of dry-goods into the

* It will be remembered that these figures are confined to *imported* goods.

country last year was about six dollars to an inhabitant. You will see that the most economical would have difficulty to get on with this amount, including as it must *all articles* of linen in use. I think you will find the use of the most expensive articles in a few of the large cities, among the wealthy classes, who have the means, and who give employment by so doing. I think during the last five years there has been much less extravagance among the American people. Ten years ago the great increase of paper money demoralized the people for the time being."

Thread-lace covers for parasols, from $35 to $60. Embroidered underwear, as high as $150 a set.

MILLINERY.

Flowers	$1.00 per spray to	$15.00 garlands.
Fancy feathers . . .	75	"	15.00 each.
Ostrich " choice colors .	5.00	"	20.00 "
" " black . .	3.00	"	18.00 "
Ornaments in Jet, Steel, Silver	75	"	12.00 "
Gilt, Pearl, &c., &c. . .			
Real thread lace Veils . .	3.50	"	25.00 "
" Blonde Coiffures and Barbs . . .	5.00	"	25.00 "
" Black-thread Barbs .	50	"	20.00 "
Straw and Chip Bonnets and Hats	2.00	"	12.00 "

Real Chantilly lace Net	$3.50	to $6.00	per yard.
" Blonde edge and trimming laces	50	" 8.00	"
Ribbons	50	" 2.50	"
Velvets	8.00	" 20.00	"

Imported trimmed Bonnets and Hats from $45.00 to $65.00.

"In the sale of such goods, as to the *proportion*, there are more of the medium prices sold than of the highest or lowest."

FURS.

"We would say that single articles of fur, of the highest prices, are not worn now nearly as much as they were, say five years ago. In 1864, '65, '66, sales of single garments — the long cloak — were very frequent, at from $150 to $600. Occasional, at $600 to $1,000. We sold one once for $1,500. We often, in those years, sold muffs from $100 to $400; small collars, from $150 to $350. Ladies are now wearing trimmings to a great extent; and nothing is too costly and rare to be cut into strips for this purpose. We have furnished trimming costing as high as $50 per yard, and have seen eight to twelve yards used on a garment. We sold, this season, a seal sack for $350; and, a month later, trimmed it with sea-otter costing $175 more. We think we could name ladies in this city who own, and keep

in general use, from $1,000 to $2,000 worth of furs merely as dress-furs. We do not mean sleigh-robes, rugs, &c. Perhaps if we give you the items of such a "set-out" it may help you.

Russian Sable, called also Siberian, muff	$300.00
" " " " " tippet or collar	300.00
Trimming to match, worn generally on black velvet, say eight yards	400.00
Ermine, large cape or pelerine, to be worn to parties, &c.	150.00
Muff, boa, cuffs	50.00
Seal sack, muff, boa, cap, gantlets	350 00
Silver-Fox, muff and boa	300.00
Eight to ten yards trimming, generally worn on silk or poplin	100.00

"In addition to all these nice things, the same person is very likely to have one or two medium-priced sets. The most extravagant thing in this way that I ever heard of was a Russia-sable carriage-robe, made by a New-York house for a "petroleum princess," and costing $5,000. We made an ermine robe for a *baby-carriage*, for which we received more than $100. If you care for more explicit or special information, we will be glad to answer any questions."

HAIR.

"In our class of custom, the proportion of more expensive sales to moderate or cheaper ones is nearly

two to one. The prices for a short band, to be used for a coronet, range from $5 to $50. Then we make some special orders, extra long hair, or extra quantity or quality, from $50 to $75. These are ordinary colors. Extra colors, — ash colors we call them, — or the various shades of red hair, cost us twenty-five per cent more to import raw, and have to be charged in that proportion.

"Then the gray or white hair is altogether another matter, costing twice and three times as much as ordinary colors. White hair, twenty-eight inches long, costs us from $80 *to* $100 *per ounce;* and sometimes cannot be had at any price. We always make to order, as it is so difficult to match, and seldom make any thing less than $50, which would be a band for the back, and a coronet braid, both made of short hair, from fourteen to twenty inches long.

"We made an order a short time ago — a band for the back, coronet, some little puffs, and a seam (a kind of half-wig, very delicate) — which came to $255. It was nearly three-quarters white, however, and made of long hair.

"Long curls are worn a great deal; and nice ones cost from $5 to $15. Sets of curls, from $8 to $25, besides various other small articles, puffs, bows, crimps, &c.

"We import every thing direct, and so only keep the best class of goods."

JEWELRY

"In reply to your inquiries, we would say it is extremely difficult to give correct prices without showing the goods. They would range somewhat as follows: —

Earrings, plated	$0.75 to $4.00	Av'ge sale,	$2.00
" gold	3.00 to 40.00	"	12.00
Brooches, plated	0.75 to 4.00	"	2.00
" gold	3.00 to 40.00	"	12.00
Bracelets, plated	1.50 to 15.00	"	3.00
" gold	8.50 to 100.00	"	15.00
Watches, ladies' silver	15.00 to 30.00	"	18.00
" " gold	30.00 to 300.00	"	75.00
Chains, Leontine	15.00 to 40 00	"	25.00
" Opera	40.00 to 125.00	"	60.00
Rings, filled	0.75 to 5.00	"	1.50
" solid	0.75 to 20.00	"	5.00
" Pearl	10 00 to 100.00	"	20.00
" Emerald	15.00 to 500.00	"	20.00
" Diamond	15.00 to 1500.00	"	150.00
Necklaces, children's	3.50 to 50.00	"	7.50
" ladies'	15.00 to 100.00	"	35.00
Charms	0.75 to 20.00	"	3.00
Crosses	1.00 to 50 00	"	5.00
Lockets	3.00 to 75.00	"	20.00
Opera-glasses	3.75 to 50.00	"	10.00

"You will note that the preponderance of small or medium-priced sales reduces the average from what

it might be supposed to be, if the range of prices were alone considered."

To these figures may be added a few which are obtained from another source.

For eleven months, ending Nov. 30, 1872, the entire importation of

Jewelry, and manufs. of gold and silver, was	$1,253,763.00
Of precious stones	2,352,472.00
Perfumery and cosmetics	974,795.00

DRESSMAKING.

In this department, the testimony runs in a somewhat conversational but very pointed style, as follows:—

"I am happy to give you what help I can. In my opinion, fully *half* of the ladies whom you have in mind are led to extravagance in dress by the influence of their husbands. This includes the class of people who have acquired sudden wealth without culture. The men desire their wives to be a kind of advertisement of their business success. They want them to dress as other ladies dress, who are of established social position.

Then a class of women have an *inherited* love of laces. They get it from their mothers and grandmothers. You can no more ignore it than you can

love for pictures or statuary. It is there. You must do something with it.

I must admit, that, in my business, I meet with a great many very shallow women. But I know a great many very lovely and strong in character.

Well? And what will you have? Laces? A very common quality of lace is $30 per yard. I use a great deal of such lace. Are there none more expensive? You shall hear.

One wedding I remember. I put point-lace on the bride's mother's dress. The lace cost, *in Europe*, $3,000. It was a rare pattern. It could be put into a box one inch in depth, and four inches square, it was so light. But that will be an heirloom in the family.

I know of shawls in this city which cost from $1,500 to $2,000.

I know of lace veils seventeen inches square, which are worth $75.

A common price for silks for dresses would be $25 per yard.

I have made a street costume of velvet, silk, and lace, which would come to $1,000. But perhaps that lady would wear that five years.

Party dresses will run from $50 to $10,000. I have made dresses worth $10,000. The cost will be in trimming lace, artificial flowers, and diamonds.

An *average* price (of my work) for a silk costume for the street (inclusive of materials) would be $600.

Paris dresses vary from $500 to $2,000 a dress. More than half the ladies in the city who "dress" will have a bill with modistes in Paris. These are two classes: the rich who inherit wealth, and the "shoddy" rich. The old families, like the ——s and ——s and ——s, dress very plainly. Their material is costly, but very plain. Just to see them about their business in a morning, you couldn't tell them from any seamstress.

Are the women who dress in the extremes of style and expense benevolent? I have been waiting for you to ask me that question. Yes: I am glad to be able to say, Yes. They are benevolent women, as a class: some of them very much so. There is a great deal of quiet and *secret* benevolence among these ladies.

I know of many instances of it which would surprise you.

I do not think that the habits of women are more extravagant than those of men. Nor even their habits of dress. In the same class of people, the men do as extravagant things as the women. I know of gentlemen who will wear in the summer three and four fresh pairs of kid gloves a day. No *lady* ever

wears more than *one* fresh pair a day, and many will wear them weeks!

I know gentlemen who make it a point to change their linen twice a day.

What woman* ever smoked a $5 cigar?

What woman ever gave $500, or even $15, for a meerschaum pipe?

In my opinion, women have been unjustly blamed for extravagance. That of the sexes is more equal than is supposed, at least in moneyed circles."

It may be added, that I have no personal opportunities of testing the figures which have been given in these several departments. The sources whence they have been obtained, however, are such as to place their accuracy and candor above occasion for investigation.

The inherent love of beauty seems to be very much like the inherent love of home and domestic life. Women possess the one and the other. Men possess the one and the other. Whether women possess either or both to a greater extent than men remains, to my mind, yet to be proved. No creature on God's earth is so much the creature of circumstance to-day

* These questions are confined, we must suppose, to American women.

as woman. With no variety of discovered animal existence are we to-day as ill-acquainted as we are with that particular development of protoplasm which bears her name.

Waiving this, however, as only adjoining our present investigation, and assuming, what is altogether probable, if, indeed, by the laws of analogy, "the presumption amounteth not to certainty," that the æsthetic principle, at least, is more largely wrought into the constitution of woman than into that of man, must we not admit as much as this at least to be true? If the love of the beautiful in dress is peculiar in any degree to the feminine nature, it will assert itself without any assistance from other quarters. Just as with the love of home. The most ardent reformer has no expectation of eradicating this element in the womanly character. The most cautious conservative can trust nature to protect her own in this respect. If it is natural for women to wash the dishes, while their husbands vote, they will wash the dishes; and no suffrage association on earth can call them away. If it is natural for them to go to the polls, they will go to the polls; and all the discussions in all the Monday's ministers' meetings in the country will not prevent them. So with the love of dress. No special pains will be needed to foster its

growth. Women are not in immediate danger of sacrificing their personal adornment to their personal culture or their higher usefulness. I have not the slightest fear that women will not remember what colors become them (if they ever knew) when they go to the ballot-box. It will be, I fancy, several years to come before the most devout young gospeller at the Easter service will forget which is the congregation-side of her new bonnet. I cannot conjure a shade of alarm lest four out of five of the women who read these words should neglect a due attention to their summer wardrobe, for the sake of improving their minds.

In that dim and blessed day when we have learned the alphabet of regard for either our soul's or our body's salvation in our costumes, when every first principle of grace, of health, and of modesty, is rigidly observed in its regulation, I risk the result with a cheerful confidence, if we are not agreeably attired, and am indeed quite ready to suppose that we shall present to the world's eye a far more graceful solution of these three problems in the study of dress than our brothers are doing to-day, perhaps more so than any day's tale will be likely to tell of them.

Men have made a science of dress; women have

made a blunder of it: it remains for one or the other to make it an art. Most of us would be thoroughly surprised, if not a little puzzled, should this consummation fail of its fulfilment at women's hands.

But, while we are forced to deny that the æsthetic element in question needs fertilizing, we must admit that it needs *cultivating*. The ground is rich. The root is hardy. The sun and the rain have not delegated their work to us. But the weeds grow rank, the trellises are beaten down, and the fair growth is blossoming itself to dishonored death in the weeds beneath our feet.

We shall do well to remember that it is *because* our love of beauty needs culture, that some of these proposed changes in our costume have become imperative upon us.

We cannot too often remind ourselves, that, if this feature in woman's constitution depended upon our present modes of dress, for proof of its existence, we should be reduced to a profound skepticism of it, which, perhaps, would be a good thing for us, but which would come with something of the shock which the discovery of the mythical character of the north pole must be to a child who has grown from infancy under the impressive influence of the popular picture

of that gigantic fishing-rod viewed as surmounted by the tank of a patent soda-fountain.

It is *because* women should dress gracefully, that their present habits of attire require a thorough revolution. It is *because*, tried by every æsthetic, hygienic, and moral law, we are wearing ugly clothes, that we must invent and welcome pretty ones.

But, further, I think we must allow, and be prepared contentedly to allow, that, whatever may be said of the past, and whatever may be predicted of the future, the absolute grace in dress cannot, in the present age, be attained by women or by men, consistently with a due regard for its graver requisites.

When Cornelia floated about her stately "domestic duties" in her flowing Roman robe; when Cicero's immortal eloquence was not hampered by a toga; or when Columbus discovered America in leg-o'-mutton sleeves, or Heloise moved softly as a lover's thought to find a book for Abelard; when Mary Stuart could have a page for every train she wore, and Raleigh laid his velvet talma in the mud for Elizabeth's royal stepping; or when the Lady of the Lake plied her dry and dainty little boat before Fitz James's chasing eyes, or Miranda fluttered like a bird — as aimless and as happy — about the shore; or when Murrillo's Mary shook off the clouds as the

dust of her feet; or when the Venus de Milo broke her arms, — the world was young. We are a little wiser now. Let us not regret if we pay something of the price of all wisdom, — that for every acquisition, an unconscious grace is lost. We have only to fancy the career of a Mary Livermore, a Henry Wilson, a John Bright, a Marie Zakrzewska, an Emily Faithfull, of any thoroughly representative man or woman of our day, as accomplished in the costumes which poets and artists have wrought into our ideals, to realize at once our limits and our privileges. We have only to contrast thoughtfully a convent of the sixteenth century with Michigan University to find ourselves contented with our restrictions. The age of the train and the toga was a patrician age. Our grand republican possibilities cannot struggle to the birth in its trammels. Our grave republican responsibilities cannot be met according to its fashion. There are times in which the question of a woman's ability to support the family, if her husband dies, is of far more importance, both to her and to society, than the number of inches which her drapery shall sweep the ground, or the type of ancient pottery after which she shall model the dressing of her hair.

It was a keen reply made by a perplexed little wife to her husband in my hearing the other day, in

the course of a discussion upon this subject. The gentleman drew from his portfolio of photographs a piece of statuary, — Zenobia perhaps, or Penelope: I scarcely noticed, except that it was a perfectly healthy, very wealthy, and exceptionably beautiful lady, whose dress lay flat upon the ground three or four inches, quite around her exquisite feet, and clung to her marvellously moulded limbs with a tenacity which would have been a serious matter if she had been turning Park-street corner on a windy day, to go shopping for the children, or to meet an appointment with a lecture committee, or visit an impatient patient, or give her music lessons, or get to her store on Winter Street, or perform any of those little, light, royal duties to which our Zenobias of to-day are accustomed. It might be questioned, indeed, if the real Zenobia — passionately fond of the chase, an indefatigable walker, perfect mistress of a horse, accustomed to head her own troops on the march — ever submitted to such an extent of drapery. Let us say Penelope, after all.

"Now," said the gentleman triumphantly, holding the picture to the light, "there is grace in that, — the curving lines, the sweeping folds. It seems as if woman must retain something of that in her modes of dress, to be a woman."

He was reminded, that, after all, it was royalty, nobility, aristocracy, which, even in the good old times, could affect such a costume as that, and that the working-women in all times have required a freer and simpler method of covering their active limbs.

"But," said he, "we do not want our ladies to dress like peasants!"

"Ah," said the wife quickly, "but our ladies have to do a peasant's work, you see!"

The statuesque age, my dear sir, has long gone by. This is the age of athletes. Atalanta has usurped Penelope's place. Hermione dares at length to leave her long seclusion.

> "Good, my Lord! . . .
> The ruddiness upon her lip is wet.
> . . You perceive she stirs:
> Start not; her actions shall be holy. . .
> . . Do not shun her,
> Until you see her die again; for then
> You kill her double!"

It has been well said, that "there are more false facts than false theories current in the world." This is so applicable to the physiological effects of woman's present style of dress, authoritative statement is so sorely needed on the subject, and I have already

added so freely to the mass of non-professional and irresponsible opinion which floats about it, that I feel a sense of unfitness in making more than "one last, long, wild appeal" to women about the matter. Go to the nearest thinking physician you can find, and obtain from her or him every namable or unnamable detail of the past, present, or future possible or probable consequences to you of the dress you wear.

If Heaven directs you to the right quarter, you will never wear it again, and will be beyond need of any lay entreaty. If to the wrong, you will go on triumphant in the prosecution of the most exquisite system of suicide which infests society; and nothing which the dreamer of unpleasant dreams could suggest to you would loosen your belt's clasp by an ell's width. In either case, my conscience will be clear.

It may be suggested, that, if you happen on a man physician, the chances are, that he will tell you, Yes: the system of corset-lacing is injurious to a female; no question about that; that their stays should be loosened, or abandoned altogether, but that he finds great difficulty in inducing his lady patients to abandon them; that the heart and lungs are crowded out of their proper places, and the circulation impeded by tight lacing; that ladies wear too thin boots, and

need more flannel; that he does not know, perhaps, of any other particular in which their clothing is seriously injurious to them; that ladies are very delicate, make the best you may of them; and how is the baby? and good-morning.

If you select a woman physician, the chances are, — ah, my heart misgives me! What are the chances, when, out of a class of twenty-five women medical students, you will see, as I have seen, only two dressing with any due regard to hygienic laws, and a certain proportion actually laced to the point of suffocation? What, indeed, shall the sheep do, when the shepherds are scattered?

However, if you chance upon such a woman physician as you are more than likely to chance upon, — for you will leave the twenty-three to search for the two, you may be sure — she will give you, in the physician's unfettered and authoritative manner, a list of simple and alarming facts about the effects which it is reasonable to expect that your dress is having, or might have, upon you; which, if you are a sensible woman, will send you to your dressmaker straightway, crying, "What shall I do to be saved?"

She will tell you that a stout, popular impression has sprung into life of late years, that the custom of tight-lacing has passed entirely away. This she believes

to be as false as popular impressions are likely to be.* Some weight, perhaps, must be given to the testimony of dressmakers — the shrewdest special pleaders on earth — when they affirm that the average dress-waist is looser than it was twenty years ago. It is for the interest of the dressmaker to convince you that you are breathing when you are suffocating; but give her word due credence. Perhaps the wasp-waist is not quite as fashionable as formerly; but that the stiff whalebone and drawn cord and barbarous steel busk, "warranted not to break," should the prisoned vital organs which it binds struggle for release in some sharp movement or unusual strain of the body, — that these are doing every year a deadly work, no intelligent woman can doubt.

* Said a professor of elocution, of experience in the instruction of both sexes, "When I first gave lessons at the Young Ladies' Seminaries, I was greatly puzzled. Some of my exercises are calisthenic, and require active movements of the arms. To my surprise, the girls could not meet their hands above their heads; many of them could not raise them half way to the required point. I was a young man, and did not know much about a lady's dress; and for some time the reason of this did not occur to me. At length I bethought me, that their mode of dress was at fault. I have been obliged to discontinue entirely the use of those exercises in girls' schools, though I think them very important to the elocutionist."

She will tell you that the little belle who laced herself into organic disease of the heart, and lies at death's door, unable to move from her bed, lest she stir the flame of that pretty imbecility which she calls her life quite out by the lightest motion, is no mournful exception, over which you may raise a thankful sigh, but a distinct and alarming type. She will tell you that our much-abused acquaintance, the New-England east wind, has a questionable responsibility in the production of female consumptives, compared with the "hundred years of tight-lacing" which has given us the typical New-England ramrod figure and chalk complexion.

She will tell you that probably not one woman in fifty of your acquaintance ever knows, except in her undressed hours, from girlhood to the grave, what it is to fill the lower half of her lungs with air.

She will tell you that you have never eaten a properly-digested dinner since that sad day when you first said to your dressmaker, standing, perhaps, on the tips of your toes to get upon the level of the glass, "A little tighter, please, — just *snug* about the belt."

She will tell you that not one woman in a hundred knows how to walk a mile on a frosty morning, when walking is a science, not a saunter, and when every drop of young blood and every agency of young life is

bounding with energy; that a woman writhes, wriggles, jerks, struggles, but never walks; that to expect a woman to perform the simplest kinds of necessary exercise healthfully, with her vital organs in a turn-screw, and her limbs in swaddling-clothes, is like inviting a martyr on the rack to have a polka with you.

She will lay especial stress, as I once heard a celebrated woman-doctor do, upon what she calls pressure upon the *solar plexus* in the dress of woman. If my comprehension of the term is not at fault, she means by this, that collection of ganglia which feeds the nerves of the abdominal viscera. This lies between the lower edge of the sternum, or breastbone, and — my anatomical knowledge falters, — but somewhere between your first tight button and your belt. Just here comes the closest pressure of your close-fitting clothes. A vast amount of the nervous illness and weakness of woman, she will assert, could be reasonably traced to this one feature in their dress. The most important nervous forces of the system are blockaded at headquarters.

She will tell you, in short, that each and every process of respiration, of circulation, of digestion, and assimilation, of waste and renewal, of brain and nerve action, necessary to the healthy condition of the human body, is distorted in the woman's body under the influence of the woman's dress.

She will lay down for your consideration this broad and simple rule: —

Whatever physiological injuries would be wrought upon a man by clothing him in a woman's dress are wrought upon a woman by that dress; in addition to these she suffers others peculiar to the sex.

Whatever physical freedom and convenience are necessary to a man's health or comfort are necessary to a woman's; from these she should never be debarred by any conventional distinctions imposed peculiarly upon the sex.

She will assure you that the intelligent and hearty adoption of this formula in the reconstructing woman's creed would, in two years, revolutionize the health, and with it the morals, manners, and brains, of every sensible woman in the country.

She will suggest that the deduction from these principles of some such simple corollary as this, —

> "My dress shall be as loose as a man's;
> As short as my daily avocations require;
> As simple as I please; and
> As pretty as is convenient," —

would solve in detail the mass of uncertainties and perplexities which possess women who are really anxious to learn to live as rational women should.

She will then inform you, as a starting-point, that you do not probably wear one single article of clothing, from your bonnet to your underwear, which is healthfully constructed or properly worn.*

That it is not sufficient to put on a double-soled boot, or a low-necked flannel, or a broad-brimmed hat; that a thorough and patient revolution of attire only will meet the demands of the case; that these riots of alteration will never go to the root of the trouble; that your dress is all wrong; and that you must be willing to understand this before you can hope to get it at all right.

She will tell you —

But "I will not anticipate" the doctor further. To her tender mercies I commend you! May she bring the pallor of alarm to your lips! May she call the hot flush of shame to your cheeks! May she summon the courage of independence to your heart, and the dignity of resolve to your enlightened eyes!

We hear it very often said, "But women dress for one another quite as much as they dress for men,"

* A lady doctor, whose habit it is always to inquire into the construction of the dress of her female patients, finds it not infrequent among them to wear from *fourteen* to *eighteen* different bindings about the waist.

and are very often asked, "Is not their vanity in competition with one another more at fault in this matter than their desire to please men?"

Undoubtedly women dress for one another's annihilation to a great and disgraceful extent. Unquestionably, their vain love of display for display's sake ruins souls and bodies enough to purify family, church, and state, in every year of our Lord that passes over our unworthy heads.

We have only to inspect the registered sources whence resorts of sin are filled: first, starvation; second, love of, or fancied necessities of, dress, to appreciate this.

But why do not men dress for one another? And why does not their vanity lead them, in competition with one another, into such crimes and idiocies of dress as women indulge in?

A good old Dutch maiden lady, whom I once knew, used to quench all arguments on the woman question with one remark, delivered with such Dutch phlegm and stoniness as discouraged all rejoinder: "Well, girls ain't boys, and boys ain't girls. There's a *monstrous difference!*"

Is it, then, because of the "monstrous difference," that women wear panniers, and men wear coats; and that girls submit to the Grecian bend, while their

brothers play base-ball? Is there a sheer, clear, essential love of display in the feminine "make-up" which men entirely lack, and which sufficiently explains the peculiarities of the feminine taste and conscience in regard to dress?

I do not believe it. If it were true, it were indeed, with greater exactness than the Dutch mind suspects, "a *monstrous* difference."

I maintain that too great weight cannot be given to the desire to attract men's interest in women, which regulates the theory — it will be noticed that I say again the *theory* — of feminine dress. *Underneath* every secondary motive, and *behind* every innocent and ignorant act of compliance with it, that desire is powerfully at work. And, further, I am assured that such a doctrine of the relation of the sexes as the world has, up to this time, adopted, could not, in the nature of things, result otherwise.

And further still. I cannot believe that any thoughtful woman — I speak only to women who think — can require any minute illustration of either of these propositions. If she should, these pages are not the place for it.

We do not quarrel with the desire to be agreeable. It is as natural for one sex to wish to be attractive to the other as it is to breathe. Nor do we quarrel with

the difference in the character of the desire, so far as it is Nature's own. It is the unnatural difference which the distorted creed and practice of society have created, which works the mischief. The subjection of one sex to the other results in making the attraction of one the business of the other. To this, as in any system of subjection, rebellion were the only alternative; and the peculiar nature of this species of subordination excludes that method of escape from the difficulty. It is the direct consequence of this state of things in the relation of the sexes, that the expression of their mutual interest should become undue and disproportioned upon the part of the subject sex.

That this expression is sadly disproportioned in women seems to me too self-evident to require discussion here. Their mode of dress is but one form of it, though one of its more prominent ones.

It is the theory of the "subjectionist" (we must all coin a word sometime before we die, I suppose) that women are reticent and reluctant in affairs of love. He talks of "maidenly reserve." He denies women the right to express their matrimonial desires on suitable occasions and in suitable speech, lest it should be found "unwomanly." He regards the school-girl as over-bold who walks in broad day and in face of all the world to meet the school-boy as nat-

urally as the boy to her, following her young heart's leadings as innocently as he, and both as much so as the birds that sing to one another over their heads. Now, whether he is correct in his theory or not, it is not to the immediate purpose to inquire, nor is an immediate opinion expressed in these pages. It is only necessary to our point to call attention to the fact, that the same girl who is trained to this sense of womanly propriety is taught to express, by her costume, a forwardness of which a good boy would be ashamed. And the woman who would compromise herself for life if she said to the man of her choice in simple English, "Do you love me?" will say to him unspeakable things in that adornment of her person by which cultivated society allows her to woo him, and to which all society directs and degrades her highest and holiest emotions. The affectional nature must express itself somewhere, somehow. Denied those methods of action to which proper culture, restraint, and balance would lead it, it falls to the lower circles, and uses the lower languages. No woman shall make an offer of marriage, we understand. An offer of marriage! No man ever makes one more distinctly than women do. He only makes it more simply and loftily.

It requires no microscopic eye to see that every

thing which tends to make *physical* attractiveness, on either side, the *basis* of interest between the sexes is the reverse of ennobling to both. The higher planes of intellectual and moral sympathy, on which alone the mutual happiness which men and women find in each other can gain a permanent foundation, can never be reached from such a foothold.

"Oh, if you mean all that!" said a young lady, "all that is another matter, I think."

"All that" is quite the same matter. It is "all that" for which a woman's dress is devised. It is "all that" that makes the difference and the danger. It is "all that" that we must change, before men and women can assume their highest and true position towards each other. It is "all that" which we have to consider when we teach our girls to wear and love an ornament because they are girls, when their brothers, because they are boys, wear none. It is "all that" which we are doing whenever we allow them to cultivate the delicate complexion, the softened hand, the shrunken foot, the slender figure, which we discourage in our boys. It is "all that" which is the matter, when, by precept or example, we allow in the education of our daughters the *room* for a *suspicion* that the adornment of the person can be

of any more importance to them than it is to our sons. It is no more important, in equality's great name! If there be any difference, it is less so. If the daughters of Eve be fairer than the sons of Adam, they have less, not more, occasion for attention to personal appearance. If women possess more physical grace than men, they do not need to depend on their clothes to say so. A beautiful girl is never so beautiful as in the simplest style of costume to which she can gain access. For every inch of frippery, she loses a charm.

I do not assert, be it distinctly understood, that the majority of women *consciously* dress upon the ruling motive of being attractive to men. If they were conscious of it, I do not believe they would do it. The worst of it is, that the instinct is too well transmitted, and the lifelong habit too fixed, to attract their distinct attention. There was never a serpent that did not hide and crawl under foot.

VI.

OUR FASHION PLATE.

But after all, as Mr. Mill asks of political economy, can the dress-reform "do nothing, but only object to every thing, and demonstrate that nothing can be done?" And still, How to do it? How to leave off corsets, and not fall to pieces? How to cut a loose waist that will not offend or disgrace the style of your friends at a wedding reception? How to shorten the skirts, and be "presentable"? What to do with the old basques that must be worn, and the old, foolish, fashionable things that you cannot afford to throw away?

These seem very idle questions. To the mass of women they are very important ones; and the mass of women cannot dress properly till they are in some measure answered.

It has been suggested to me that a few practical hints from the experience of those who have already

found a certain solution of these difficulties may not be found out of place at the close of this paper.

Had I the sole responsibility of dressing a more or less stylish young lady in some approach to a sensible manner, I should begin by removing her corsets.

Of course she "never laces." Of course she can "turn around in them." Of course you can "put your hands under them anywhere." Of course "they are so loose that they are round under her arms half the time." We know all about that. We have heard it a great many times before. It is a very old story. If a woman were dying of the close clasp of steel and whalebone, she would cry, "Loose enough!" with her last gasp. Undoubtedly she believes it — the more's the pity! We will not pause to argue the point with her. Off with the corsets!

Take them down stairs. No, don't give them to Biddy. Never fasten about another woman, in the sacred name of charity, the chains from which you have yourself escaped. Never give away your earrings, when you have acquired a distaste for the wearing of them. Never make presents of the gewgaws and frippery which your maturing taste discards. What is intrinsically unbecoming or unrighteous is as unbecoming and unrighteous for

your cook as for yourself. Never spread the spoiled leaven, and dare to congratulate yourself that your own bread of life is sweetened by a better. So burn up the corsets! No, nor do you save the whalebones. You will never need whalebones again. Make a bonfire of the cruel steel that has lorded it over the contents of the abdomen and thorax so many thoughtless years, and heave a sigh of relief; for your "emancipation," I assure you, has from this moment begun.

A certain sense of freedom follows this change. The lungs partially dilate. The heart feebly feels for bounding-room. The nerve-centres are disturbed with an uncertain parody of ease. But a greater sense of discomfort grows upon you. The heavy skirts drag upon the hips. The back, perhaps for the first time in your life, begins to ache. The spine grows sore to the touch. An exhausting faintness takes possession of you. The delicate sensibilities of the solar plexus (let us be learned when we can!) quiver in an irritated and irritating manner. A worrying nervousness takes possession of the whole frame. By night you are ready to resurrect the ashes of your departed corsets — for which I was quite prepared when I begged for their *auto-da-fé*. You are miserable and discouraged. This is precisely

the point at which most women who "mean well" are led to abandon their half-hearted or half-instructed efforts at dress-reform altogether. This is precisely the period at which they should be most thoroughly confirmed in it, and most seriously afraid to delay its accomplishment.

So far from indicating that you should return to your stays, these uncomfortable sensations indicate that you have not been a day too soon in their removal. These are not the sensations of a healthy and untrammelled organism. The uncorseted savage knows nothing of them. Are women born in whalebone jackets? Did Heaven create Eve with a natural inability to hold her fair, fresh body up without the assistance of Mrs. Ford's latest patent? Is there reason, in the eternal nature of things, why your brother can stand straight, and feel at ease, in clothing as loose as your wrapper, and you "drop all together" unless you can lean upon a long steel rod?

Your discomfort is the discomfort of the poor old prisoner in the "Tale of Two Cities," who must needs bear with him, into his late and affluent liberty, the shoemaker's tools, — the degrading sign of that sadder mental captivity of which the body's bondage was the type. Your sensations are the sensations of a released captive, — not to be humored, be assured, for

liberty's sweet sake. Every one of them is an appeal to you to persist in the unshackling which has produced them, in the name of common nature and of common sense. Each one is a new form of an old fact. Why, we have authority for believing that there existed, before the war, negro slaves who did not desire the emancipation of their race!

But when you have endured them for twenty-four hours, or until you have reached a "realizing sense" of their extent, and their cause, and their disgrace, proceed to relieve them as follows: —

Go to the nearest gentleman's furnishing store, and purchase a pair of light suspenders. Do not go to the women's stores; for the straps you will find there, with exceptions so rare that you may shop for a week without meeting them, are attached to bustles and other enormities. Unless you are a large woman, you will not wish for a pair longer than would fit a boy of eighteen or twenty years. Those can be as white and "ladylike," if you are concerned about that point, as the rest of your underwear. Sew up the six button-holes in the suspenders and put six buttons in their places, and put six button-holes in the bindings of all your skirts. The abundance of skirting compulsory upon women requires some such arrangement as this. Though I

know some women who prefer wearing two pairs of straps, thus substituting the addition of buttons simply, for the making of button-holes in the skirt. Others hang every thing upon a stout cotton waist. Others still prefer a very loose dress-waist sewed upon its skirt, and worn with a little sack. Others yet use a gigantic species of hook and eye in place of buttons. For a few days this arrangement will be uncomfortable, perhaps, across the shoulders or lungs; but that will soon wear off, and will be a thousand-fold compensated for by the great relief of lifting the skirts from the hips.

You should never wear more than two skirts, — the dress and the underskirt; and these should be of as light material as possible. Your own comfort will lead you to this, in a very short time after you have once begun to learn what comfort is. You require no crinoline, which is a foolish and dangerous article of dress. Nor any bustle or pannier in pity's name! If you wear, or think you must wear, the conventional upper-dress, let it be either of one piece with the waist, like the polonaise, or buttoned like the other upon your straps.

So far so good. But you are not yet comfortable. In fact, as time wears on, you grow less and less so. It occurs to you one day that your bindings are too

tight. Of course they are. So is your dress-waist. "Too loose to look decently" in the reign of the corset, when you had no means of knowing how a dress ought to feel, with strata of whalebones between you and it, the costume has grown mysteriously and appallingly tight. You loosen the bindings an inch, another, two; the demands of the partially released and ever-struggling organs behind them grow, and will not be satisfied. Some idea of the unnatural restriction to which the ordinary modes of dress subject a woman's system, may be formed from the fact that a woman who wears a *twenty-two* inch corset, a woman who really never "laced," or followed the extreme of custom in the dimensions of her clothing, and a slender woman, who is in general losing not gaining flesh perceptibly by the scales, will require, at the end of one year and a half of corsetless existence, a *thirty*-inch dress-binding for her comfortable wear.

Loosen your bindings, then, till freed nature is content. If it is forty inches, no matter. You will have a more graceful figure, before you will have done with it, than ever you have had yet.

But still there is one thing lacking to your ease. Something is yet wrong. The longer breaths you are able to draw, the longer you must draw. The more

easily the process of digestion goes on, the more ease therein is craved. Nature grows exacting in her freedom. Obey her! obey her to the letter, if so be that you may yet atone for long disloyalty.

It dawns upon your imagination, vaguely, slowly, and sadly, one day, that your plain waist and you must at last part company. You have let it out: little result. You have let it out again: temporary relief. You have made a new one: you put both fists under while Miss Snipper "fit and tried;" but behold here is a mystery! There is yet a sense of pressure, a sense of misery, a shortening of breath, a crowded-out feeling beneath the arms, a nervous rebellion against that restraint "from the first tight button to the belt," which has become well-nigh intolerable.

You have reached that point of enlightenment now at which you are prepared to snap your finger at fashion-books, and count the expression upon the countenances of your rich relations as chaff before the wind of your poor necessities. With your body's release, your soul's independence has grown perhaps. At all events, you will be comfortable in your clothes, or you will die in the attempt.

But what to do next? The plaited gamp resolved the problem of existence until the first dinner-party,

or the first full-dress religious soirée of the season in "your town." Then you felt as the business-man feels if he gets to church by mistake in his gray Scotch sack-coat. You did not feel *dressed.* You came home in despair.

Now, a hint just here. Your new polonaise was to have fitted the figure. Countermand the order. Retain, if you like, the basque back of the garment, or some similar finish, and send the fiat forth for a perfectly full, loose front, plaited or plain, which you can loosely and gracefully confine by a belt which may originate at the side seam, beneath the arm. This arrangement, particularly if turned back at the throat over a neat, thick, white underhandkerchief, — a very becoming and sensible method of wearing the linen, — has a graceful and finished look.

But the mysteries of a woman's toilet are past finding out; and still there is the old basque to be remodelled, and yet there is the July heat to consider, when, in addition to the need of thinner covering in the upper part of the dress, many women must feel that of wearing portions of their winter attire in a bisected form.

(The superior coated and vested masculine intellect is requested not to puzzle itself with these details).

Take the old basque, then, or make the new one, in this manner: To the large remainder of the garment, add the difference of what women call "new fronts" only. Direct the modelling of these after what the pattern-books would denominate a "half-garment;" that is, a garment neither loose nor tight, neither fitted nor unfitted, neither a squeeze nor a slouch. Such a garment requires only one bias, and and an inventive dressmaker, to give it as much "air" as the wearer is capable of carrying.

By this time, assuming that you possess some courage, a great deal of obstinacy, and a little ingenuity, we may consider that you have found breathing-space in your costume sweet and sure enough to last a lifetime. Neither the moods of fashion, nor the pitying scorn of dressmakers, can move you now or hereafter. Your determination to live, move, and have your being as a human being should, belongs to those things which cannot be shaken. You will marry, bury, or "receive" your most modish acquaintances in your loose little jaunty jacket now without a pang.

It remains to relieve the misery and danger of your still heavily-weighted hips, — while the long and abundant skirts are imperative, an insoluble problem. Improvement, however, is possible even in this direction.

A lady who dresses "like other folks," and a lady who dresses somewhat as a lady should, purchase, for instance, a silk suit at the same time. The proportions of the two wearers being nearly similar, the one will require twelve and a half yards in her pattern, the other, twenty-four. This gives some idea of the amount of extra weight imposed upon the bearer by the ordinary methods of trimming, as well as a hint to the average woman's pocket in respect to the *quality* of her clothes. The same sum will purchase for the one nearly or quite twice as rich a quality of material as it will purchase for the other. Women are very dull at solving the equation: cheap stuff profusely trimmed is to an elegant material unornamented, as is the tumbled scrip to the silver specie, or as the dollar-store jewelry to Tiffany's, or as the restlessness of any sense of imperfection to the dignity of essential worth.

But we are trying now only to be comfortable, not beautiful. Remove the burdensome kilt-plaiting from your skirts, then. Rip off the heavy folds. Put the full force of your displeasure and your scissors upon the clumsy frills and foolery. Reduce your costume to its original products, — the smooth surface, the graceful fall, the fair, unbroken sheen of color. Quite apart from the prompt dictum of your improv-

ing taste, "How much better I look!" will be the happy consciousness of decreased weight to be carried by the burdened hips. "The very women," said a popular city dressmaker, testifying on this point, "who trim so are the women whose backs ache so that they can't try on their dresses."

Only one more alteration remains practicable in face of existing modes, to increase the necessary sense of ease, and to decrease in a slight degree the real dangers to which you are always exposed by the length of your drapery. Cut your dress as short as you can wear it without attracting unsuitable attention in a public place. How short this can be may be gathered from the fact that a lady of my acquaintance wore her dress at a distance of five inches from the ground for many weeks without its exciting the notice of her friends as an impropriety, or a novelty, or as being at all, and that the gentlemen of the family, when their attention was called to it, stoutly discredited the distance of the "sweep," and were only convinced of its actual enormity by the testimony of the foot-measure and the yardstick.

But do not flatter yourself that you are yet hygienically attired. Every article of your underwear, excepting the suspenders and the garments which they support, requires alteration still. In no one direc-

tion is the folly of a woman's dress more evident than in the construction of her underwear. You can find valuable suggestions on this point by sending to the New-England Hygeian Home, in Concord, Vt., for patterns of hygienic underwear. The sum of fifty cents buys you these patterns. There is also a Health Home in Danville, N.Y., I *think*, where the patterns of the American costume can be found. Some similar outfit is strictly imposed upon the lady patients in almost all such institutions. I cannot personally vouch for the satisfactory character of these patterns; and, if you make it a point of conscience to employ a seamstress who can provide you with the garments you want on condition that you provide her with the ideas, you will not need them. It is enough to say, in general and in public, my dear young lady, that you must suspend every single article of clothing which you wear, even to your flannels, from the shoulders, by some device or other, if you would attain any approach to real comfort.

You require now thick, double-soled boots, a loosely-fitting sack or cape, and a broad-brimmed, full-crowned hat to equip you for the street. Your hat must go upon your head, not upon your chignon, which I devoutly hope has been, like the other un-

necessaries of your costume, somewhat reduced by this long process of synthesis and analysis. You require no parasol to impede your hands, nor veil to hold this and last season's accumulated dust-germs like an ether sponge to your lips. In wet weather your still long and injurious skirts will require the interposition of a heavy gaiter between themselves and the dampening ankles. These can be made of water-proof cloth, or even of the remains of your brother's old coats, with great advantage. A pattern for such gaiters can be obtained at Madame Demorest's for fifteen cents.

In such a costume as I have described, even if entirely untrimmed, I can testify that a lady may go anywhere, at home or abroad, to the county fair or the symphony concert, to the afternoon female prayer-meeting, or to dine with the last new poet, and not meet with an instance of disagreeable recognition of her independence, other than a possible and really endurable stare from a dry-goods salesman, or a certain obtuseness on the part of the hotel *employé*, — a punishment not greater than her mental or moral calibre can bear.

I may add one word more, at least to exculpate myself from the charge of overlooking how the

weary faces of worn women have fallen at the mention of the inexorable stitches which drop so lightly from the pen but so heavily from the fingers.

To many of them a new garment is like a new grief, and mending-day as the return of a familiar spasm, and "six new button-holes," a perplexity out of which they cannot see the way. How shall they add to their over-burdened strength and time the extra task of planning and executing that serious insurrection, a dress-reform? They may be dying of corsets and heavy skirts, but it seems to them easier to die than to get out of them!

Dear friends, don't do it! Not an extra stitch! Not an added sigh! For whatever labor (performed by whatever means) will be necessary for arranging your new clothes hygienically, shall be far more than offset by the absence of trappings in them. And whatever extra and unexpected work is required to renew your old clothes can be done by a professional seamstress, both to her good, your relief, and your mutual glory. Earn, borrow, or beg the money to pay a woman, but have the woman! She can in one day, or at the most two, put your wardrobe into a rational condition. You will pay her from fifty cents to a dollar a day. If your health and happi-

ness are not worth two dollars, you must be either poorer than any woman I know, or it can scarcely be worth your while to live at all, and you might as well die of your dress as in any other way, as far as I know.

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